

## Against the Grain

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# Biz of Acq -- Quick Tips for Media Selection and Acquisitions, Part II

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# Biz of Acq — Quick Tips for Media Selection and Acquisitions, Part II

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Hello again. The last time we got together (February '08), we discussed the selection and acquisition of media materials: what to buy and where to buy them. This time around, let's chat about foreign DVDs, Blu-ray discs, and what to do with all of these DVDs once they get to your library.

Foreign DVDs: A good portion of the DVDs my library buys supports the learning and teaching of foreign languages. This means, naturally, that I find myself and my acquisitions colleagues buying DVDs from vendors all over the world. When we can, we prefer to buy from the foreign **Amazon** sites because they use the same account name and password as the US site, the checkout process is identical, and the customer service and shipping is of the same high level. That covers French, German, and Japanese discs (and discs from the UK), but for Spanish, we rely on *dvdgo.com* (which has an English-language interface and fast but expensive shipping). For Chinese and Korean discs, we use *HKFlix.com*, a US-based importer. For Indian DVDs, we like *nehaflix.com*, but their selection and availability of titles can be inconsistent. We have ordered from many other distributors in many other countries with few problems, even if it took us a while to figure out what our "Lösenord" was on a Swedish DVD site. Placing an order on a Website in a language you don't speak is enough of a challenge, but what do you do with the DVD once it arrives? It's likely to be region-coded, meaning that most DVD players sold in the United States are blocked from being able to play it; and if it's from a European country or Australia, it's likely to be in the **PAL** broadcast standard, which is incompatible with the North American and East Asian **NTSC** standard. Should you even be buying this material if your users cannot access it?

If you're in an academic library and fortunate enough to run your own media viewing center or, like me, work with classroom technology people who understand the importance of not being locked into North American/region one DVD releases, you probably already have one or more all-region DVD players that allow a user to play back a DVD from anywhere in the world — regions one through six, **PAL** or **NTSC** — without difficulty. If you're really lucky, you have this kind of DVD player in most of your AV-equipped classrooms across campus as well, and your faculty and students

don't have to worry if the DVD player in their classroom will play the DVD in their hands. And though most computers can play discs from other regions and do not differentiate between **PAL** and **NTSC**, there is usually a limit to how many times you can change the region of a computer's DVD drive. After so many changes, it locks into a given region. Because of this, we encourage students to use our library's viewing stations for these DVDs. If your users take DVDs home, though, you're going to run into some problems.

We collect a lot of non-region one DVDs, and the issues of region coding and broadcast standards do cause some confusion for our patrons. Our catalogers try to make sure that the bibliographic record of any non-US DVD has some sort of note about the region coding or the **PAL** standard, and we also put orange tape on the spine of the DVD to signify that the disc is non-region one and/or **PAL**. Of course, most of our users aren't poring over **MARC** records and aren't savvy to our color-coding system, so we also put a pop-up note in the item record of these DVDs so that when someone checks one out, the system reminds the circulation staff to warn the patron that it's a non-standard disc that requires an all-region DVD player. Even with these three methods of notification, though, we still get some folks complaining that the disc "didn't work in their player". There's only so much you can do, though, and (for academic libraries, at least) I think it's better to have the material available in some form than not at all.

Blu-ray Discs: Whether or not you purchase foreign or non-region one DVDs, you and your library have only been dealing with the DVD format for just over a decade. Now that the high-definition format war has ended and Blu-ray has won, it is rather rattling to have to think about another new format when you're still trying to catch up with the last one. And just what does the emergence of Blu-ray mean for libraries? I assume that very few libraries of any type are equipped with high-definition TVs and Blu-ray disc players, and I would guess that even fewer college and university campuses have this equipment available in classrooms. But public library or academic library, your users do have this equipment at

home in increasing numbers. Will this new format take off and replace DVD, or will it remain a niche format like the laserdiscs of yore? Should you start to buy Blu-ray discs now or wait and play catch-up like many libraries did with DVD? I wish I could give you a perfect, oracular answer to these questions, but all I can offer is a cautious suggestion to experiment. As a format still trying to launch, Blu-ray discs have the benefit of being priced nearly the same as DVDs, so cost is not a major concern. And now that the format war is over, there is no danger of buying a disc that will be obsolete in just a few months.

I am in the midst of experimenting with Blu-ray at my library. I took a chance and bought a copy of *Planet Earth*, the very popular **BBC/Discovery Channel** series, on Blu-ray. We already have the DVD version and it is one of the most popular titles we own. If the Blu-ray edition gets checked out even a tenth of the times the DVD has (and it's already well on its way to that number), I will look into buying more Blu-ray titles for our collection, particularly if they are titles that benefit from being viewed in high-definition. Because it is unlikely that Blu-ray will replace DVD entirely, I won't be withdrawing any DVDs from our collection as I have done as DVDs replaced VHS tapes. Because of its high level of consumer adoption and the capability of Blu-ray players to play DVDs, DVD will be with us for a long time to come.

Processing Priority: Since I'm only experimenting, I'm not buying many Blu-ray discs right now. I'm also not buying as many foreign DVDs as I used to because of miserable currency exchange rates, but I continue to keep our acquisitions and cataloging staff busy with regular old DVDs. In the last three years, we have increased the size of our DVD collection by eightfold. On top of all of the books and other items streaming into our library, our technical services staff has to find some way of dealing with the more than one thousand DVDs I order every year.

Instead of processing DVDs on a first-in, first-out basis, we prioritize them according to a "triage" system that gets the most-needed items out into circulation first. All DVDs enter-

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# Biz of Acq — Budget 101 or Here We Go Again

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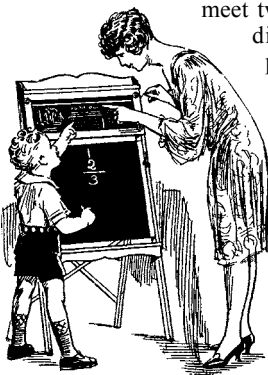
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As summer draws to a close, we can look forward to several annual events: fresh local produce, the upcoming football season, and those follow-up emails and phone calls from all of the sales representatives who we met at the summer library conferences. One other event that we await with some trepidation is when the administration has set the new tuition levels and determines the new library budget allocation.

The moment of truth? A healthy increase means you can cover inflation with some new resources. Anything less means big problems: cancellations. To make matters worse, most of us are part of big deals and consortia agreements that limit our available cash.

At the 23rd annual **NASIG** conference in Phoenix, I heard depressing horror stories from institutions across several states of slashed budgets, forcing emergency decisions. Paper journals and microform titles were being cancelled. One library decided to stop commercial binding of its journals. Another institution was cancelling their book approval plan and not buying any paper books this year.

In Michigan the collection development librarians from the fifteen public universities meet twice per year to discuss common purchases and issues. One of the favorite topics is when we all share our current budget situation, since what occurs at one may affect the others. As you



know, Michigan has been having its shares of financial woes.

How to divide the library budget has been the topic of numerous articles and books. A recent question posted on the listserv, collib-l, in August brought out various suggestions with formulas. It again demonstrated that there isn't one right answer.

At **Eastern Michigan University** the budget is divided by format (book/approval; bindery; electronic resources; gift accounts; journals; media; microform; supplies, services, and materials; standing orders), then divided into funds by subject. The subjects are fields of study and do not correspond necessarily into an equivalent department at **Eastern**. While every department is assigned a librarian as their liaison, a fund is not owned by a single department, and more than one selector may spend it. Each selector is responsible to make sure that all areas of their liaison departments are fairly covered.

To cover interdisciplinary topics, we have set up two subsets of additional funds. One subset is for broad topics, which we call basic science, basic humanities, and basic social sciences. For instance any item that covers general science (call number Q) would be assigned to the basic science fund instead of arbitrarily spending one of the specific science funds such as chemistry or biology. A second subset is to cover multicultural studies. We have designated funds for such areas as Latino American, Asian American, Native American, and Gay and Lesbian Studies to make sure those areas are represented in our collection since these fields are covered in the humanities and social sciences.

Finally we often set money aside for a new program to help it get underway. For instance the **College of Technology** created an **Aviation**

**Management Program**. Since it was a unique field of study for our institution, we designated a separate fund in order to build a collection. After a few years the fund was absorbed into the Technology fund.

How much gets allocated to a specific book fund is a combination of the negotiations between the individual selectors and the Collection Development Librarian and past practice. Allocations will vary some from year to year.

For example at **Eastern Michigan University**, the librarians are included in the new course/program development procedure. We receive copies of all new proposals. The selectors/liaisons are encouraged to comment about how this proposed course/program is already complimented by the collection and the additional resources that would be needed to adequately support it. The selector would therefore have evidence to back their need for supplementary money for journals, books, or any other format.

As undoubtedly yours does, our institution continues to expand. During the last decade our institution has added doctorate programs in clinical psychology and technology. There is another doctorate under negotiation. Nearby **Oakland University** will be creating a medical school in 2010, the **Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine**.

Past practice remains an essential ingredient to the budget picture. Certain programs carry more prestige and have large enrollments. A higher percentage of the budget must be held for them. **Eastern Michigan University** has evolved from a teacher's college and it remains one of the largest producers of elementary and secondary school educators in the country. The **College of Education** figures strongly when we review the budget.

## Possible Remedies:

How can you prepare for the budget challenges? You need contingency plans:

1) **Usage data**. The majority of electronic resources have been great with providing usage data. If you haven't been collecting data on your paper resources, you need to start. To compliment our electronic journal data, we have been tallying the paper use. It has started a project to make sure all of our bound journals have barcodes, so we can just scan them in order to collect the data. Our Assessment and Systems Librarians have also run circulation reports on the book collection, so we can tell what call numbers (subjects) have been getting use.

For instance, our book and journal data showed us that the physics collection (QB, QC) was being underutilized per the cost of their titles. This gave a basis for us to initiate

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ing the library get sorted by acquisitions staff according to the following criteria: Because our faculty need the video materials they order for their teaching, any video title requested by a faculty member gets priority cataloging. Because we often get a short interval between the time a request is made by faculty and the time they need to use the item, priority cataloging sometimes becomes "rush" cataloging. In rare cases, it becomes "slapping a barcode on it so it can be checked out immediately and worrying about cataloging when the item is returned". Anything that I order as a matter of collection development takes less priority

(though I do sometimes bump a DVD or two into the priority pile if I know people will be wanting to use it), and gifts and freebies go to the bottom of the heap.

Relying on existing **OCLC** records for cataloging as much as possible; making minimal local modifications to those records; having an efficient, experienced acquisitions and cataloging staff and student workers who enjoy ripping shrink wrap off of DVDs means that all new materials get processed quickly and no backlog stacks up. Every day or so, I go through all of the new DVDs and notify faculty personally if items they requested are ready to check out, and every week, I post a list of all new DVDs to the library Website. And then I go back to buying more DVDs. 🐼